

REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested.

I. Status of the Claims

Claims 13, 17 and 20 have been cancelled.

Claims 14 and 16 have been amended with no new matter added.

Claims 14-16 and 18 and are pending in the application.

II. Acknowledgment of Allowable Subject Matter

Applicants thank the Examiner for acknowledging that claims 16 and 17 as presented in the Response filed November 25, 2003 were allowable if written in independent form. The Examiner's acknowledgment was in the Office Action mailed January 2, 2004 (Paper No. 1203). Applicants have amended claim 16 to be in independent form and recite the elements as presented in the November 25, 2003 Response. Thus, Applicants respectfully submit that claim 16 is in condition for allowance.

III. Rejection Under 35 U.S.C. § 112

Claims 13-18 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, first paragraph, as failing to comply with the written description requirement. The Examiner contends that a process gas mixture consisting of an inert gas, an oxygen gas and a nitrogen gas, as recited in claim 13, is not described in the specification.

